

## *Indigenous people will save planet*

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### **Body**

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Developed nations have created ambitious goals to help stop the climate collapse of the planet, while ignoring something crucial to saving us: the voices of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous nations are not given a seat at the decision-making table when it comes to creating climate change solutions - yet it's Indigenous peoples who will ultimately step up to save the Earth from destruction.

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told the world during a speech at the historic United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, also known as COP21, that Indigenous people can teach the world how to care for the planet.

While outlining the principles on which Canada will base its climate action plan, Trudeau included a reference to the importance of working with Indigenous people.

"Indigenous peoples have known for thousands of years how to care for our planet," said Trudeau. "The rest of us have a lot to learn and no time to waste."

But five years later, Canada - and the rest of the world - is falling short of meeting its goals to reduce harmful emissions. Canada bought the multibillion Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) pipeline project in 2018 and committed to redirecting its profits to investing in green energy projects.

However, according to research by the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, the TMX will exacerbate Canada's "emissions reduction problem." Emissions from the oil and gas sector are on track to exceed Canada's emission targets by 81 per cent, even with a cap on Alberta's oilsands emissions.

The pipeline, along with dozens of other industrial projects, runs through Indigenous lands. These are a small portion of lands and waterways which haven't been destroyed by settler ambitions of "progress" and economic gain.

It has been five years since Canada released the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, a list of calls to action for Canada to achieve reconciliation. Yet, Canada continues to war with Indigenous land defenders who are protecting their lands and waters from ruin, like those opposing the TMX.

It's a war to protect the Earth many of our ancestors foresaw. You see, our people knew the climate crisis was coming, and have known for thousands of years. It's not something that took us by surprise.

The very word Indigenous means "of the land." Our people are the closest to the land, and carry vital ancestral wisdom on how to care for it. For millennia, our Indigenous ancestors walked in physical and spiritual balance with the Earth and its resources.

## Indigenous people will save planet

It wasn't until the tide of colonialism swept in that the land began to deteriorate. The greed of colonial rulers ushered in unsustainable development, causing excessive pollution and the climate crisis we are now in. Meanwhile, Indigenous land caretakers were removed from their traditional territories or imprisoned on tracts of land called reserves, while their territories were pillaged by colonial powers.

Although Indigenous peoples contribute the least to climate change, they are the first ones to experience its effects, due to their close relationship with the environment and its resources.

Long ago, prophecies were given to tribes around the world about the times we're in and the role Indigenous peoples will play. We are living out the prophecy of the Seventh Fire generation, as told to the Ojibwe Nation. It speaks of a new generation rising to restore what was taken.

According to the prophecy, the Ojibwe people will rise to offer two paths to the "light skinned" race. One road will be to materialism and technology, and the other will be to spirituality. The prophecy says, "If the light skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, then the destruction which they brought with them will ... cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people."

There are other prophecies, like that of the Hopi Nation of a Third World War being fought over water. We are already seeing this with Indigenous land defenders protecting their water sources, and water being traded as a commodity like gold or oil.

There's an ancient Lakota prophecy of a Black Snake - slippery and in motion - that would come to "devour" the earth. That black snake is oil, which is poisonous and pollutes everything it touches.

These are just some of the many prophecies about Indigenous peoples arising to help save Mother Earth. We are now living in these prophesied times. But, our people have already lived through devastation - the apocalypse of colonization against our lives - for generations. Through it all, Indigenous peoples have managed to maintain their traditional knowledge, even if it was left to one generation, or even one individual, to carry on these sacred ways of survival.

Our people have the know-how: the natural and enduring expertise and land-based technology to help mainstream society in this climate crisis.

In California, the Yurok and other tribes have reinstated their millennia-long tradition of strategically lighting the forests on fire to clear out the brush to prevent wildfires.

Indigenous nations in British Columbia and Washington, U.S. are adapting to climate change affecting their salmon stocks by creating spawning beds and planting shady trees to cool down the river that's gradually heating up.

In Central/South American and Caribbean regions, Indigenous peoples are shifting their agricultural activities and their settlements to new locations which are less susceptible to adverse climate conditions.

Other Indigenous groups, like those in Fort Chipewyan, are creating economic opportunities on their lands by tapping into renewable energy like wind and solar power.

The 355 million Indigenous peoples of the world maintain 80 per cent of the planet's biodiversity, and within those lands are massive amounts of carbon.

We are seeing increasing blockades, demonstrations and arrests of Indigenous land and water defenders who are fighting against harmful development in their territories to protect their last, pristine ecosystems for all humanity. This is just the beginning.

Indigenous nations hold the keys to sustaining our world and preventing climate change. It is our purpose to stand in this fight for life on Earth - now, and in the future. Won't you stand with us?

Brandi Morin is an award-winning French/Cree/Iroquois journalist from Treaty 6 in

Alberta.

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